A Critique of Deism

by

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Abstract

Deism has long served as an intellectual haven for those convinced of God's existence yet are disenchanted with organized religion. Despite its principal doctrines resonating with many, deism is not discussed and debated in the public sphere as often as theistic or naturalistic worldviews. Mindful of this, the purpose of this article is to shed light on deism's core doctrines and offer a critical assessment of their soundness. I advance three critiques of deism: 1) deism is incoherent given God's wisdom; 2) deism is incoherent given God's moral character; and 3) divine revelation is possible and significant. I also refute two arguments in favor of deism: 1) the impossibility of miracles and 2) the argument from divine hiddenness. I conclude that deism suffers from grave theological difficulties that warrant deeming it an unviable religious worldview worthy of rejection.

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Section 1: Defining Deism

We can trace deism's inception back to the late seventeenth century,[1] with its emergence constituting a significant event in the English Enlightenment (Beiser, 1996, p. 220).[2] Rigidness, corruption, and intolerance of the English Church, coupled with the foreign travels of young men who had been exposed to disparate cultures and religions practiced by non-Christians, spurred the growth of deism (Wigelsworth, 2009, p. 27). Over time, deists became increasingly strident in their advocacy and eventually gained widespread attention—particularly appealing to the educated classes—by the end of the eighteenth century, setting itself up as a formidable rival to Christianity in particular, and as an alternative to theism in general (Morais, 1932, pp. 436 & 452-453; Gorham, 2013, p. 126; Herrick, 2014, p. 2).

So what is deism? What does it teach about the purpose of life, the afterlife, and divine judgment? What are God's attributes? What does God expect from his creation, if he has any expectations at all? Is there any value in believing in divine revelation? Are miracles possible? I will attempt to outline the range of views held by deists on these matters in order to tease out the

[1] Some deists would counter that deism is in fact the world's "most ancient" religion (cf. Voltaire, 1972, p. 386). It is alleged to be so ancient that even the first man to exist is said to have been "created a deist" (Paine, 1892, p. 68). Though the deistic concept of God may more closely resemble some notions of God adopted by the likes of Plato and Aristotle than theism (Davis, 1983, p. 148), and despite medieval Islamic scholars' refutations of the arguments typically employed by deists (Zouggar, 2012), an actual systematic development of deism only appears to have emerged later on in late seventeenth century England.

[2] Westphal describes deism as "the religion of the Enlightenment" (2010, p.134).

most salient ones shared by them and arrive at a minimalist definition which will serve as the basis for my critique.

§1.1: Deism's Stance on God's Providence[3]

Many deists believe that God "endowed the world at creation with self-sustaining and self-acting powers and then abandoned it to the operation of these powers acting as second causes" (Orr, 1934, p. 13). God's causality is limited to creating the universe, whereby he establishes the laws of nature and allows the universe to operate like clockwork, thus earning him the title "The Great Watchmaker" (Miller, 1996, p. 128; Gould, 2005, p. 463). Moreover, God is detached from the relatively 'mundane' affairs of his creation in such a way that he will never be concerned enough to intervene in the universe, hence rendering him a God who is "remote and religiously unavailable" and who can only "be thought but not felt" (Viney, 2010, pp. 100-102). Baruch Spinoza (d. 1677) stresses that God's 'tinkering' with the laws of nature he put in place (i.e., performing miracles or sending divine revelation) would entail his imperfection: "So if anything were to happen in Nature contrary to her universal laws, it would also be necessarily contrary to the decree, intellect and nature of God" (2002, p. 445).

However, deists have not always held this conception of God's providence, especially during deism's early development (cf. Attfield, 2004, p. 430; Pailin & Manuel, 2015, para. 3). Mossner differentiates between the *historical deists*[4] and the *philosophical deists* by pointing out that the former embraced the providence of God (2006, p. 681). Wainwright observes that before

[3] Divine providence relates to God's involvement in the universe.

[4] Who Mossner states primarily existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

the late eighteenth century, deists did not adopt any "absentee God" doctrine whereby God created the world and then abandoned it (2013, p. 54).

In summary, while in the first century of deism's development most deists affirmed God's providence, the notion of God being distant and inoperative in the world continued to gain traction until it became the dominant view among deists.

§1.2: Deism's Stance on Revealed Religion

As a result of denying God's providence, most deists reject notions of revealed religion which teach that God communicates to his creation via divine revelation. Deists do not denounce everything revealed religions teach; rather, they only repudiate those elements they believe have caused human suffering (Penelhum, 2005, p. 22).[5] Deists claim to seek a religion which fosters unity between human societies and believe that such a religion's foundation must be grounded in "universal reason" rather than church-like authorities (Westphal, 2010, p. 134).

Deists also reject aspects of religion they deem "superstitious," "supernatural," and "nonsensical" according to human reason (Gould, 2005, p. 463; Love, 2008, p. 182; Westphal, 2010, p. 134). Thomas Morgan (d. 1743), an English deist thinker, maintains that anything revealed by God must be comprehensible to human reason (cited in Lucci & Wigelsworth, 2015,

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[5] Thomas Paine (d. 1809) indicts revealed religion for some of the world's worst tragedies:

> The most detestable wickedness, the most horrid cruelties, and the greatest miseries that have afflicted the human race have had their origin in this thing called revelation, or revealed religion. It has been the most dishonorable belief against the character of the Divinity, the most destructive to morality and the peace and happiness of man, that ever was propagated since man began to exist (1892, p. 176).

p. 180). Accordingly, deists reject 'absurd' doctrines like the Trinity and the divinity of Christ (Dupré, 1999, p. 2; Wainwright, 2013, p. 54; Bristow, 2017, para. 57). Conversely, some deists believe in the necessity of revelation to justify some of their espoused doctrines. They argue, for instance, that belief in the afterlife or God's moral dictates requires divine revelation,[6] while in contrast, other deists insist such beliefs could be deduced via reason alone (cf. Morais, 1932, p. 435; Penelhum, 2005, p. 22; Wainwright, 2013, p. 54; Lucci & Wigelsworth, 2015, p. 171). In emphasizing the futility of revealed religion, Voltaire (d. 1778) proclaims that "the only gospel one ought to read is the great book of Nature, written by the hand of God and sealed with his seal" (cited in Love, 2008, p. 64). And Paine, who also rejected divine revelation, stresses that only in deism do reason and belief find perfect harmony:

> There is a happiness in Deism, when rightly understood, that is not to be found in any other system of religion. All other systems have some things in them that either shock our reason, or are repugnant to it, and man, if he thinks at all, must stifle his reason in order to force himself to believe them. But in Deism our reason and our belief become happily united. The wonderful structure of the universe, and every thing we behold in the system of the creation, prove to us, far better than books can do, the existence of a god, and at the same time proclaim his attributes (1892, p. 398).

[6] Oddly enough, several of the early deists in England, despite identifying themselves as deists, inclined toward acknowledging Christianity as a unique divine revelation from God and believed in divine miraculous interventions in the world; see Lucci & Wigelsworth (2015, p. 168) and Pailin & Manuel (2015, para. 8).

In summary, with regard to divine revelation, the dominant view of deists is that religious beliefs can be acquired through reason alone, so there is no need for God to communicate to us via divine revelation, and any religious beliefs which cannot be acquired solely through reason must be rejected. The stance a deist takes on revealed religion directly correlates to his viewpoint on God's providence. In other words, a deist who negates God's involvement in the world will also negate divine revelation by default.

§1.3: Deism's Stance on God's Moral Character

Many deists believe that God, despite his nonintervention in human affairs, has provided a moral outlook and endowed human beings with reason so that they may discover his moral edicts. Deists deem it essential for any metaethical theory to consider the relationship between man and God and God's intentions for his creation. They believe that through the observation of human nature, man can comprehend that both the prevention of evil and the pursuit of personal happiness[7] are in concordance with the nature God created for man (Lucci & Wigelsworth, 2015, p. 173). For such deists, morality ties in with the ultimate purpose of man—his happiness. Man is born good yet commits evil of his own free will. To pursue happiness, man must seek justice by emulating God, for God is "infinitely powerful, is infinitely good and supremely just" (Mossner, 2006, p. 688). Matthew Tindal (d. 1733) describes a God who is "infinitely happy in himself, could have no other motive in creating man, but to make him happy in this Life, as well as that which is to come" (Tindall cited in Viney, 2010, p. 174). And Spinoza describes the loving of

[7] They believed that the pursuit of *personal* happiness must be constrained by its alignment with the *general* happiness of others.

God as the pinnacle of good and as man's ultimate aim in life (2002, p. 428). According to Paine, the religion of the "true" deist is to imitate God in his moral traits:

> The true Deist has but one Deity, and his religion consists in contemplating the power, wisdom, and benignity of the Deity in his works, and in endeavoring to imitate him in everything moral, scientifical, and mechanical (1892, p. 49).

Nevertheless, not all deists believe God is good. For example, Voltaire suggested that deism would be subjected to the same criticisms lodged against theism if God's goodness were to be affirmed. The argument from evil, he charges, would continue to prove troublesome for any doctrine seeking to maintain God's infinite power and goodness simultaneously. Consequently, Voltaire denied God's goodness and posited that he was an impersonal—albeit intelligent—being incomprehensible to human beings (Mori, 2018, pp. 328-329).[8]

To summarize, deists are in stark disagreement regarding the moral character of God, with some upholding God as the ultimate good all humans should aspire to emulate and others stripping God of any virtuous moral traits.

§1.4: Deism's Stance on Prayer

Some deists disagree with the notion of prayer and argue that God has no desire for it (Love, 2008, p. 64; Viney, 2010, p. 102). Others, however, pray zealously to God (cf. Lucci & Wigelsworth, 2015, p. 168). Lord Herbert of Cherbury (d. 1648), known as 'The Father of English Deism,' contends that human beings have been naturally predisposed to recognize that

[8] It does not appear that Voltaire always adopted this stance. In some of his earlier works, he explicitly affirms the goodness of God; for example, see Voltaire (1972, p. 386).

God is worthy of worship and that living a life of virtue is an essential aspect of that worship (Pailin & Manuel, 2015, para. 4). Some deists maintain that contemplation of nature inspires a desire to worship God out of gratitude for the graciousness he shows his creation.[9] However, in their view, they do not require being taught how to pray to God, for that is something that they can discover on their own (Bristow, 2017, para. 59).

In short, not all deists believe in praying to God, and those who do disagree on the manner they should.

§1.5: Deism's Stance on Divine Judgment

Many deists reject the notion of divine judgment after death, for to them, God is not a "God of fear and trembling, of punishment and damnation" (Manuel, 1983, p. 34).[10] In contrast, deists such as Benjamin Franklin (d. 1790) believed in an afterlife where people would be rewarded and punished for their deeds (cf. Viney, 2010, p. 86). Some deists subscribe to the doctrine of salvation, while others reject it as well as the concept of human immortality (Viney, 2010, p. 94; Herrick, 2014, p. 20). Paine is agnostic concerning the afterlife and resigns to "leave all these matters" to God (1892, p. 261).

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[9] Richard Swinburne gives the analogy of a child who is duty-bound to respect his parents to emphasize the point that human beings owe it to God to worship him (1993, pp. 212-213). On the other hand, some argue that even if God does exist, there are no rational reasons for deeming him to be worthy of worship; see Bayne & Nagasawa (2006 & 2007). Immanuel Kant (d. 1804) dismisses the notion of prayer altogether because "God can receive nothing from us" (Kant cited in Westphal, 2010, p. 135).

[10] Nevertheless, some deists such as German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (d. 1716) disagreed that exacting punishment compromised the goodness of God (cf. Pailin & Manuel, 2015, para. 13).

In short, deists disagree over whether divine judgment after death will occur. Assessing what the dominant view among deists is proves challenging, for a deist's stance on the afterlife cannot be deduced by knowing what other doctrines he adopts.[11]

§1.6: Reaching a Minimalist Definition

The preceding exposition of the range of views held by deists evinces that deists are far from monolithic in their conception of deism.[12] Defining deism has long posed a challenge to academics, with attempts to delineate it likely to leave one "in confusion" (Hefelbower, 1920, p. 217). This is because several renowned deists have historically articulated radically divergent conceptions of deism. As a result, some have noted the difficulty of conceiving deists as a unified group, given deism's elusiveness (Byrne, 1989, p. xiii). This is why great care must be given to ascertain what each self-professing deist believes on an individual level (Hefelbower, 1920, p. 217; Herrick, 2014, p. 19). It is common to encounter differing viewpoints among

[11] For example, one cannot surmise that a deist who denies God's providence also denies divine judgment.

[12] English and Anglican philosopher Samuel Clarke (d. 1729) distinguished between four categories of deists: 1) those who affirm the existence of God as eternal, infinite, independent and intelligent, yet this God does not concern himself with the affairs of the world; 2) those who affirm God's providence, yet view him as an amoral being unconcerned with the moral actions of man; 3) those who affirm God's providence and moral character, yet deny immortality; and 4) those who affirm God's providence, moral character, and an afterlife wherein one's deeds are judged yet deny divine revelation (Yenter, 2018, para. 55). Academics continue to point out the distinctions between the various strands within deism, whether it is the radical "non-Christian" deism of the seventeenth century versus the more "mild" English deism of the eighteenth century, or English deism versus the more "radical" French deism or other "European deisms," etc. (Wigelsworth, 2009, p. 12; Herrick, 2014, pp. 1 & 21).

followers of any religion. Nevertheless, shared beliefs that unite a religion's adherents under a theological umbrella must exist. In the case of deism, identifying those beliefs which have been consensually held by deists consistently from the time of deism's inception until now is not a simple task, given that deists have differed among themselves on every single fundamental doctrine. Notwithstanding the disparity in the range of views held across the deistic spectrum, it is essential to formulate a workable definition of deism.

I shall define deism as *the belief that man must believe in God who created—yet remains uninvolved in—the world and that man should only accept religious and moral knowledge obtainable through the strict use of his reason alone.* This definition entails that a deist 1) believes in a distant noninterventionist God and, by default, dismisses the occurrence of miracles and 2) rejects any religious knowledge solely acquired through divine revelation. I opted for this definition because it underscores the two principal claims the vast majority of deists have agreed upon from deism's inception to date.[13] My definition is neutral regarding other contentious doctrines (e.g., God's moral character, immortality, etc.) for which it is difficult to assert a definitive 'mainstream' stance or those doctrines which are not essential to adopt to be

[13] Westphal identifies three Enlightenment motifs that drove deism: 1) autonomy of human reason; 2) concern for religious tolerance; and 3) anti-clericalism (2010, p. 134). The vast majority of deists more-or-less agree in rejecting any aspects of religion, be they doctrines or rituals, they believe are incomprehensible to the human intellect. Also, the more 'organized' a religion appears in terms of having a clerical establishment, revered religious figures, and sets of divinely ordained rituals, the more antagonistic deists tend to be toward it. Most deists are dismissive of reports of miracles, and this is true even among those who are receptive to the theoretical possibility of their occurrence.

considered a deist (e.g., affirmation of God's wisdom). With this definition in mind, I proceed to the next section, where I offer my critiques of deism.

Section 2: A Critique of Deism

In the following sections, I will advance three critiques of deism: 1) deism is incoherent given God's wisdom; 2) deism is incoherent given God's moral character; and 3) divine revelation is possible and significant.

§2.1: Deism's Incoherence Considering God's Wisdom

In this section, I will first define divine wisdom. I will then elucidate how we can rationally deduce that God is wise. Next, I will discuss how we should conceive God's wisdom in terms of its magnificence and exemplariness. Finally, I will argue that significant theological obstacles confront deism, regardless of whether it attests to God's wisdom or not.

§2.1.1: What is Wisdom When Attributed to God?

Ibnul Qayyim Al-Jawzīyyah (d. 1350) describes divine wisdom as encapsulating "God's desired ends of his creation and commands, for whose purpose he created and legislated" (2003, vol. 2, p. 451). ʿAbd Al-Ra'ūf Al-Munāwī (d. 1621) defines wisdom as "effectuating truth with knowledge and action. Wisdom from God is knowing things and actualizing them with utmost mastery" (1990, p. 145). And Ibnul Wazīr (d. 1436) articulates God's wisdom as "a specific kind of knowledge which God has about unknown benefits,[14] good intellects, and preferable interests.

[14] By "unknown benefits," Ibnul Wazīr means unknown to humanity, for due to our limited knowledge, we do not always know what is best for ourselves.

This manifests in the actions of God [by transforming from] from potentiality to reality" (1987, p. 181).

In summary, God's wisdom can be defined as that aspect of his knowledge that wills the enactment of anything which furthers the objectives and goals God set out in his intended act.

§2.1.2: How Do We Know God Is Wise?

Ibnul Qayyim Al-Jawzīyyah asserts that God's wisdom can be deduced both rationally and innately (1994, vol. 2, p. 113).[15] English philosopher and theologian William Paley (d. 1805) maintains that God's intelligence and wisdom are inferable through the intricate design we observe in his creation:

> Contrivance, if established, appears to me to prove every thing which we wish to prove. Amongst other things it proves the *personality* of the Deity...These capacities constitute personality, for they imply consciousness, and thought. They require that which can perceive an end or purpose; as well as the power of providing means, and of directing them to their end.[1] They require a centre in which perceptions unite, and from which volitions flow; which is mind. The acts of a mind prove the existence of a mind: and in whatever a mind resides is a person. The seat of intellect is a person...Wherever we see marks of contrivance, we are led for its cause to an *intelligent* author. And this transition of the understanding is founded upon uniform experience. We see intelligence constantly contriving, that is, we see intelligence constantly producing effects,

[15] Ibn Taymiyyah points out that the majority of "Muslims and non-Muslims" alike believe that God's wisdom connotes that his dictates and injunctions are purposeful (1989, p. 921; 2000, p. 199).

> marked and distinguished by certain properties; not certain particular properties, but by a kind and class of properties, such as relation to an end, relation of parts to one another, and to a common purpose (2006, pp. 213-215).

Thus, the existence of an intelligent being knowledgeable, powerful, and wise enough to create and maintain the physical universe with all its complexities would logically entail that this creator's power, knowledge, and wisdom are, at the very least, exceedingly magnificent.[16]

§2.1.3: What Does God's Wisdom Entail?

Ibn Taymiyyah argues that the precision and mastery in God's creation do not merely exemplify God's wisdom but also necessitates that there be a purpose underlying each of his creative acts (1989, p. 924). In other words, it is insufficient to assert that God is wise without also recognizing that every act of his, especially one as significant as creating the universe, has an underlying purpose. Ibn Taymiyyah's understanding of 'precision' and 'mastery' here is: "The allocation of everything in its suitable place, in order to effectuate the intended objective" (Ibid., p. 921). He contends that affirming that God possesses both free will and wisdom requires accepting that there *must* be a reason *why* God chooses to perform a specific act, *x* (e.g., create the universe), in favor of not performing *x* (Ibid., pp. 925-926). If a wise person who freely prefers *x* does so for a reason, then what about a perfectly or exceedingly wise God? Hence, God's placement of human beings on planet earth must have been for a purpose.

[16] It is not my intention here to appeal to the *argument from design* to prove God's *existence* but only to demonstrate God's *wisdom* to potential negaters of this attribute who already believe God exists.

A potential objection to consider here is whether sufficient evidence exists to suggest God is wise in a *perfect* sense. Yujin Nagasawa claims that:

> The design argument purports to establish the existence of an intelligent designer of the universe and its inhabitants...However, none of these arguments, even if sound, directly establishes the existence of the being than which no greater is metaphysically possible. Suppose that all of these arguments are sound and that all of them lead to the existence of the same being. It then follows that there is a necessary, supernatural, very powerful, very intelligent being that is also the ultimate origin or cause of the universe and morality. Yet it is still far from clear that such a being must be the being than which no greater is metaphysically possible. It could well be that a higher intelligence has all these impressive properties without reaching the level of the greatest metaphysically possible being (2017, p. 35-36).[17]

However, as I shall establish in the following section, my argument does not require that *perfect being theology*[18] be true. For my argument to succeed, demonstrating that God is *exceedingly* intelligent suffices. In making the rational case for affirming God's intelligence, Paley states that:

> The *attributes* of such a Being, suppose his reality to be proved, must be adequate to the magnitude, extent, and multiplicity of his operations: which are not only vast beyond

[17] Also see Wainwright (1999, p. 61) and Hick (2017, p. 25).

[18] The widely adopted theistic doctrine that there is no greater conceivable being than God.

> comparison with those performed by any other power, but, so far as respects our conceptions of them, infinite, because they are unlimited on all sides (2006, p. 230).

As Paley rightly notes, God's wisdom should be *adequately* affirmed. And by observing the astounding precision exemplified in the design of creation,[19] one could deduce that God's wisdom, even if finite, is at least *exceedingly* remarkable.

§2.1.4: The Problem God's Wisdom Poses for Deism

After underlining what divine wisdom entails and demonstrating how it could be rationally deduced that God is either perfectly or exceedingly wise, I now formulate my argument as follows:

Premise 1: Wisdom necessitates acting in a meaningfully objectives-driven manner.

Premise 2: God is either perfectly or exceedingly wise.

Premise 3: Deism does not affirm God's intervention in the world.

Premise 4: God's wisdom is incongruous with his nonintervention in the world.

Conclusion: Deism is incoherent.

Premise 1 is evident, for our conception of someone wise is one who acts *wisely*, and wise acts are those performed to fulfill predefined objectives.

[19] Samuel Clarke (d. 1729) convincingly argues that if one affirms omniscience and omnipotence for God, then by default one should also attest his wisdom as an omni-attribute (1998, pp. 79-80). Thus, undermining the magnitude of God's wisdom would demand that we consistently do the same for at least his power or knowledge as well.

As for premise 2, I demonstrated previously how God's wisdom could be rationally deduced. Furthermore, many deists passionately embrace the argument from design[20] and, by doing so, affirm that God is at least *exceedingly* wise. Because of believing in how exceedingly wise God is, deists should hesitate to attribute any meaningless or substantially reckless acts to God.

Some modern deists, however, may base their belief in God's existence on considerations other than the argument from design and, as such, may not deem it necessary for God to be exceedingly wise. The scope of this article does not permit a detailed treatment of the merits of the teleological argument; however, attempting to diminish God's wisdom, even to a level that does not conflict with worldly nonintervention, could still be countered by asking the deist to consider the inherent relationship between God's attributes of power, knowledge, and wisdom. Can a God who is exceedingly powerful and knowledgeable be unwise? Surely if God is knowledgeable about what constitutes wise courses of action, then for him to *wittingly* act imprudently would render him unwise. If, on the other hand, God is *unwittingly* unwise because of ignorance, then this compromises the greatness of God's divine knowledge. Yet, how could an unwise and/or ignorant God be exceedingly powerful? Real power requires an accurate understanding of how to carry out actions in addition to a disciplined willingness to enact

[20] Deists used to refer to God as "The Great Architect" (Gould, 2005, p. 463) and were as equally passionate as theists in rebutting atheism. Though deists sympathized with atheistic revulsions towards certain theological doctrines (Gorham, 2010, p. 126), they did not excuse disbelief in the existence of God altogether (Gorham, 2013, p. 137). This is ironic given that theological opponents of the Enlightenment thinkers commonly used the term *deist* as an insult to signify that the accused was guilty of either heresy or atheism itself (Gould, 2005, p. 463).

effectively, thereby requiring intelligence. Intelligence demands one effectively apply his knowledge and capacity. We do not expect unwise people to act intelligently. Thus, it appears that the deist cannot undermine God's wisdom without diminishing his power and knowledge. Hence, undermining God's wisdom carries theological implications the deist would sensibly want to avoid. It is perhaps for this reason that I have yet to encounter a deist who explicitly undermines God's wisdom.

Regarding premise 3, I concluded earlier that the central position of deists on God's providence is that God remains *inoperative in* and *unconcerned with* the world he created.

Premise 4 is the crux of my argument and the claim most likely to meet resistance from deists, as it strikes at the core of their theological stance. I argue that God's wisdom is incongruous with his nonintervention in the world. For what reason did God, as a free agent, will the universe into existence? If for no reason, then the act is purposeless and meaningless and, therefore, unwise. Even if the deist can explain why God created a universe without reason, explaining why God *persists* in permitting its existence without caring about it will be challenging. What ends and aims does God seek to fulfill by allowing the continued existence of the universe? Surely God—given his perfect or exceedingly vast knowledge—is aware of the affairs of the universe and has not *literally* forgotten about it. What, then, is the wisdom in God's consistent 'giving of the cold shoulder' to his creation?

Some may accuse my approach of being overly anthropomorphic and consider it inappropriate to subject God to our 'finite notions of wisdom'. They may argue that people work assiduously to perform acts to obtain something in return, unlike God, who does not need to gain anything nor expend any effort when performing even the most astounding of acts, such as creating the universe. However, my argument makes no such anthropomorphic assumptions. My

argument is *not* that God *needs* something in return for the actions he performs, but rather that God, as a perfectly or exceedingly wise free agent, performs acts that must have an underlying purpose to them (e.g., testing a human being's patience or exhibiting a display of his might and glory). I contend that claiming that an exceedingly wise God creates an intricately designed universe for *no purpose at all* conflicts with his divine attribute of wisdom.[21] Surely, deists can recognize the deficiency of the wisdom of one who either performs purposeless acts or performs acts whose outcome he is not interested in. Thus, even according to their favored epistemic method (i.e., strict use of reason to deduce the nature of God), deists should acknowledge the predicament of affirming God's wisdom while simultaneously denying his providence.

Another potential objection is the claim that God possibly created the universe for a meaningful purpose, yet he simultaneously chooses to be unconcerned with it afterward. For instance, a deist may argue that God created a world of free agents for the purpose of contemplating his glory and moral dictates, yet God does not involve himself in their affairs and lets them be. However, this potential response does not adequately address my objection that God's wisdom is incongruous with his worldly nonintervention.[22] Merely positing any possible purpose for God's creative act does not suffice to render the action *wise*. If that were the case, then any reason could be offered, such as God creating out of boredom for self-entertainment.[23]

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[21] Geivett notes that the design of the universe suggests that God has "a remarkable measure of interest and concern for the welfare of human persons" (2005, p. 323).

[22] This response could also be critiqued on moral grounds, as I shall demonstrate later.

[23] An example of such a God-denigrating hypothesis can be found in Hume's *Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion*, where the character Philo tells Cleanthes that the world may have been the byproduct of "some infant deity, who afterward abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance" (Hume, 2007, p. 45).

Rather, it is essential that the underlying purpose not contradict God's status as a perfectly or exceedingly wise being. Moreover, if God created human beings for purpose *x*, then we expect that he will be *concerned with* and *take an interest in* the fulfillment of *x*. Why would God create humans to contemplate his glory and moral law if he were not interested in the outcome? What if a human being fails God's test by failing to contemplate responsibly and engaging in morally depraved acts—should not God care enough to know and react by either intervening or, perhaps, becoming angry at such people? God's creative act for a particular purpose yet active uninterest in that purpose's fulfillment is a testament to a deficiency in him.

In response, the deist may emphasize that 'nonintervention' and 'unconcern' are not synonymous and argue that it is possible to imagine a concerned God distantly observing how human beings pursue virtuous lives but refuses to intervene at all. Nonetheless, this revised claim would be a radical ad-hoc shift in the deistic stance, for the basis upon which deists rest their assumption of God's nonintervention is precisely God's lack of concern for and attention to the world he created. To assert that God *is, in fact,* concerned with the affairs of the world yet *definitely,* or even *most probably,* chooses not to intervene in it is a bold claim requiring evidence for its support. On what basis can the deist be confident that God chooses not to intervene in the world despite being concerned about its affairs?

A possible evasion of my argument exists: The deist could argue that God is an 'immensely wise amoral person' or an 'evil genius' who takes pleasure in abandoning his sentient creation. In this way, the deist could reconcile God's unconcern for the universe with his perfect or exceedingly remarkable wisdom. However, this argument comes at a heavy theological cost—namely, the compromise of God's goodness. My next argument obstructs this route for the deist.

§2.2: Deism's Incoherence Considering God's Moral Character

In this section, I will explain what divine goodness is and whether it can be rationally deduced as an attribute of God. I will then argue that deists, both those who affirm and negate God's goodness, face serious theological challenges to their respective stances.

§2.2.1: What Does It Mean to Say That God Is Good?

To say that God is 'good' is to imply that we attribute all that is good to him, such as being perfectly or exceedingly benevolent, compassionate, just, etc., and that he never commits evil (Davis, 1983, p. 86).

§2.2.2: Can God's Goodness Be Rationally Deduced?

Ibn Taymiyyah held that if we affirm that God is both omniscient and independent (which many, if not most, deists do), then we can logically infer God's goodness:

> The human being does not desire that which is evil except due to a deficiency in his knowledge. He may desire evil either due to ignorance or to satisfy a personal want. He could also be mistaken, for he thinks that the action is good, while it is not. Thus, he commits evil acts either due to his simple or compound ignorance. And God is far removed from this; it is impossible that he ever commits evil (1989, p. 925).

Samuel Clarke expands more on Ibn Taymiyyah's substantive argument. He posits the idea of "fitness," in which different things have necessary and unchangeable relations to each other because of their inherent nature. In the realm of morality, for example, it is most 'fit' and 'suitable' for human beings to respect each other's rights, to avoid gratuitously harming each other, etc. Considering this, God, in his "infinite knowledge" and perfect wisdom, can never be

ignorant of these "fitting" relations, nor can he ever mistakenly violate these relations. Furthermore, because God is "self-existent," "absolutely independent," and "all-powerful," he does not need to violate the "fitness" of things to acquire something, nor could any irrational emotions negatively sway him to commit such violations. Based on these presumptions, Clarke deduces that God must be "infinitely good," "infinitely just," and "true and faithful" (1998, pp. 83-86).

Understandably, not all theologians and moral philosophers welcome Clarke's argument. Divine Command Theorists who believe that God's commands determine the moral status of actions would likely object to Clarke's argument because it suggests that God conforms to eternally unchangeable and necessary rules of 'fitness,' while it is God to whom all should be submitting. Nonetheless, I do not intend to explore the validity of Divine Command Theory. I only present Clarke's argument because I believe that deists grant its presuppositions. They reject revealed religion and believe that through reason and 'contemplation' of nature one can arrive at God's moral dictates. Since Clarke appeals to our reasoned recognition of the 'fitness' of moral relations between things, his arguments seemingly align with the moral-epistemic methodology of deists.[24]

[24] It is tempting to interlink the adoption of Divine Command Theory (DCT) with the espousal of revealed religion; however, this is not necessary. DCT is primarily a metaethical theory which teaches that objective morality is grounded in God's commands rather than a method of moral epistemology. In its essence, DCT is neutral when it comes to explicating how we come to know God's commands. Thus, the theological option remains open to the deist to embrace DCT by believing that morality is grounded in God's commands, yet also professing that we *epistemically* learn of God's moral dictates through the strict use of reason independent of divine revelation. Nonetheless, as I will show, the deistic stance on God's providence proves problematic for deists who affirm God's goodness.

A deist might object that Ibn Taymiyyah's and Clarke's arguments rest on an assumption which deists do not grant, namely that God's attributes are perfect. However, both their arguments still demonstrate that God is at least *exceedingly* good if we affirm that God is *exceedingly* powerful, knowledgeable, and independent.

§2.2.3: The Problem Posed for Deists Who Affirm God's Goodness

After having defined what divine goodness entails and demonstrating how it can rationally be inferred that God is either perfectly or exceedingly good, I now formulate my argument as follows:

Premise 1: Goodness necessitates benevolence and justice.

Premise 2: Deism affirms God's goodness yet negates his worldly involvement.

Premise 3: God's goodness is inharmonious with his worldly noninvolvement.

Conclusion: Deism is incoherent.

Premise 1 is evident, for it is hardly contentious that benevolence and justice are virtuous moral traits.

As for premise 2, I have already underscored the various positions held by deists regarding God's goodness and providence. In the next section, I will also address the strand of deism that denies God's goodness; thus, despite the unqualified phrasing of premise 2, I am not generalizing against deists.

Premise 3 is the crux of the argument. I argue that God's goodness is inharmonious with his worldly noninvolvement. Is a man who abandons his family without a legitimate excuse a faithful father and husband? Is a shepherd who takes his flock to graze where he knows wolves lurk and abandons them there a good shepherd? Is a babysitter who leaves a baby to crawl

unsupervised near an ungated pool a responsible babysitter? Is a police officer who stands idly by while witnessing an elderly lady get robbed and battered a committed police officer? Is a teacher who attends a lesson unprepared and fails to deliver the content necessary to pass the exam a caring teacher? Is an employer who fires an employee for violating an arbitrary rule the employee was never informed of a just employer? Without a second thought, reasonable people would answer no to these questions. If sensible people feel so repulsed about such behaviors when exhibited by humans, then what about God, who remains distant from and unconcerned with the affairs of the sentient beings he created? Does such a God align with our conception of a perfectly or exceedingly good God? No. The analogies I offered demonstrate that abandonment of responsibilities, emotional indifference to gratuitous suffering, and unfair expectations and treatment of others are negative moral traits. I maintain that these are precisely the traits that must be attributed to a God who is apathetically uninvolved in the world he created.

It is clear that the deistic God not only ignores the pleas and prayers of people but refuses to communicate with them to offer them hope or explain the reasoning behind the existence of rampant evil in the world. The deistic God created humankind and abandoned them to traverse life's hardships without any clear moral guidance,[25] words of encouragement and hope, and any display of compassion and love. Yet, we are expected to emulate this God's moral character (because he is supposedly 'good') so that we may attain happiness? Surely, this is nonsensical. Deists insist on rejecting divine revelation and argue that by merely 'contemplating' over nature through unaided reason, human beings can discern the righteous moral traits of God. The problem with this deistic stance, however, is that if the deistic God exemplifies the traits

[25] I will demonstrate later on the importance of divine revelation and the problems associated with the deistic claim that based on reason alone, we can reliably come to know God's moral laws.

practiced by the father, shepherd, or other individuals I alluded to in my analogies, how can we deem God to be perfectly or exceedingly good when we can all agree that these traits are bad? With this, I present my argument in support of premise 3 as follows:

Premise 1: Deism claims that we can know morality via our reason.

Premise 2: Deism teaches that God is apathetic to the world he created.

Premise 3: Our reason tells us that an apathetic God is exceedingly immoral.

Premise 4: God cannot be both exceedingly good and immoral simultaneously.

Conclusion: The idea of an apathetic yet exceedingly good God is incoherent.

The deist can try disputing premise 2 by denying that God's noninvolvement in the world entails that he is apathetic to it. God, the deist could argue, cares very much about the affairs of his creation: he observes with great pleasure when humans do good and with sorrow and anger when they do not, but he chooses to be uninvolved *in this life* because he desires to test humanity by gifting them with the faculty of reason to use for making the right moral choices. This God, the deist could further claim, will judge everyone in the afterlife and ensure justice is served for everyone. However, this is a highly ad-hoc explanation. Such a response is nothing more than an arbitrary cherry-picking of doctrines until a desirable theological package deal is produced. Furthermore, how can one deduce such claims via the strict use of reason alone? God's noninvolvement in the world could have multiple explanations for it, such as: He simply does not care about the world; or he has completely 'forgotten' about it; or he is 'busy' attending to the affairs of other worlds; or perhaps he *intends* to intervene in the future and is just 'taking his time'! Without divine revelation, how can we reliably know? Of course, the aforementioned explanations are not theologically appealing, but the point is to highlight how wide open the door

is if we strictly rely on our subjective reasoning alone to concoct our creeds. Secondly, if, for argument's sake, we were to grant that God's noninvolvement need not necessarily imply apathy and that God truly does care, we must question what level of caring is reasonable to expect from a God that is perfectly or exceedingly benevolent. I submit that the level of care that includes intentionally neglecting to provide sufficient moral guidance, hope, compassion, and reciprocal love is not only arguably the epitome of negligence, given God's power and knowledge, but also unbefitting of a perfectly or exceedingly benevolent god.

The deist could also attempt to dispute premise 2 by either undermining God's power or knowledge by suggesting that God desires to communicate to his creation but is *unable* to, or he would communicate if he were *aware* of the affairs of his creation. Thus, God only 'appears' to be apathetic to the world because he is *unwillingly* uninvolved in it, either due to a lack of perfect power or perfect knowledge. However, even by compromising God's omnipotence and omniscience, it is still rationally problematic to explain how God can be exceedingly powerful and knowledgeable enough to create something he *can never* interact with or be unwillingly *unaware* of. Such a compromise of God's power and knowledge is hardly an attractive theological solution to this problem.

In summary, there are serious difficulties with simultaneously upholding a conception of a God who is perfectly or exceedingly good yet wittingly chooses not to be involved in the affairs of the world. Some deists recognize these difficulties and, as a result, have negated goodness as an attribute of God altogether. Nonetheless, in the next section, I will argue that negating divine goodness does not help deism evade the charge of incoherence.

§2.2.4: The Problem Posed for Deists Who Negate God's Goodness

There is a strand of deism that views God as either evil or strictly amoral. Deists who *do* affirm the goodness of God directly tie in God's goodness to their purpose in life, namely attaining happiness by pursuing a virtuous life by emulating God. As a result, they are able to, in theory at least, proffer an ontological foundation for morality—viz. God.[26] In contrast, deists who *do not* attribute goodness to God cannot undergird objective moral values in God. With this said, I present my argument:

Premise 1: Objective morality exists.

Premise 2: Objective morality cannot exist if God is either evil or amoral.

Premise 3: Deism affirms that God is either evil or amoral.

Conclusion: Deism is incoherent.

Regarding premise 1, I have only encountered deists who either affirm objective moral values explicitly or implicitly through ethical critiques of theistic religions when alleging their responsibility for evils in the world, such as warfare, religious intolerance, etc. This indicates that deists believe that such things are objectively evil. Hence, premise 1 is granted by the overwhelming majority of deists.

Premise 2 forms the crux of the argument. Can the divine-goodness negating deist find an independent foundation to ground objective morality in? Many atheists would gladly assist deists by sharing some ideas; however, the struggle to proffer an independent objective moral foundation is not equal for both the atheist and the divine-goodness negating deist. For according

[26] Notwithstanding the aforementioned difficulties riddled in their position.

to atheism, there is no God, meaning no ultimate personal being exists who created the world and its inherent properties. Deism, on the other hand, professes the belief in the existence of a deity who is the *source of all things* and maintains that God created and transcends his creation. If deism teaches that God is either evil or amoral, then the only way to develop an ontological basis for objective morality is to identify a moral foundation *independent* of God. But the atheist does not carry such a burden, for all he must do is merely find an adequate grounding for objective morality.[27]

If God is amoral, then he did not create things with inherent moral properties, for how could an amoral agent demarcate between good and evil? And if the ultimate source of all things did not instill moral worth into anything he created, how can objective moral values exist? Moreover, if God is evil, he could judge that things like murder and rape be deemed praiseworthy.[28]

Even if we were to discover a source for objective moral values independent of God, we would still face another problem—namely, the cosmic authority of God. If God is evil, he would either not care if we abide by any moral injunctions from this independent source of morality or possibly even be displeased with us if we do. Given that this evil God is the only cosmic

[27] This article will not explore whether such efforts by atheists have been or could be successful.

[28] It is difficult to ascertain whether an evil God would be interested in making evil moral injunctions or reward people for committing evil; however, the possibility cannot be ruled out with certainty to someone who truly believes God is evil.

personal agent with the power to judge us, we are not left with much reason to feel compelled to recognize the moral authority of an impersonal foundation of objective moral values.[29]

The deist may opt for the 'divine amorality' argument and suggest that human beings, in their self-interest, seek to discover and adhere to an independent foundation for objective morality, while God distantly 'minds his own business' without care. Surely, however, there is something peculiar about the notion of divine amorality to begin with. If God is omniscient or exceedingly knowledgeable, then God, by necessity, would know whether there does exist such a thing as objective right and wrong. And to have knowledge of such objective moral values and then willfully be unconcerned about them is itself a morally deplorable stance which renders God to be evil! I frame my argument against the notion of an 'amoral God' as follows:

Premise 1: Willful indifference to objective moral values is a moral deficiency.

Premise 2: An amoral God knows about and is indifferent to objective moral values.

Conclusion: An amoral God is morally deficient.

As for premise 1, I have already demonstrated earlier that God's worldly noninvolvement is a morally deficient act. If God knows that his unconcern with creation is objectively wrong (according to the independent standard of objective morality which allegedly exists!), then his willful persistence in his apathy would make him evil!

[29] Even if this independent source of objective morality does exist, this does not necessitate that we are duty-bound to submit to it, especially if it will not hold us morally accountable for any wrongs we do. Thus, the deist who believes God is evil would not feel obliged to acknowledge the authority of this independent moral foundation.

Premise 2 can be avoided by alleging God's ignorance of an independent objective moral standard that humans come to discover; however, this is hardly an appealing argument to make. Even if, for argument's sake, one posits that human beings uncover this independent objective moral standard before God 'is made aware' of it, how can one maintain that God unwillingly remains ignorant about it after human beings have discovered it, talked about it countless of times, and urged each other to act in line with its dictates?[30]

The conclusion of the argument imposes upon the deist the problems associated with affirming that God is evil, namely that God's cosmic authority coupled with his unconcern for one's ethical choices plays a substantial role in enabling people to legitimize their unethical behavior.

In summary, the divine-goodness negating deist faces three unappealing choices: First, he could affirm that God is either evil or amoral without believing in an independent standard of objective morality; however, this affirmation comes at the cost of denying that objective moral values exist. Second, the deist could affirm that God is evil while simultaneously believing in an independent source of objective morality;[31] however, the deist must then grapple with the difficulty of justifying why people should submit to this independent moral foundation's authority. Third, the deist could affirm that God is amoral while also believing in an independent

[30] The same response applies to one who argues that an amoral God is ignorant about the notion of morality itself. An omniscient or exceedingly knowledgeable God should *at least* be able to 'learn' and 'grasp' the concept of morality after listening to humans talk about it at length.

[31] I am strongly persuaded to believe that this is impossible; however, for the sake of argument I have entertained its possibility.

source of objective morality; however, the deist must contend with the inherent incoherence of divine amorality and address the same difficulties confronting deists who affirm that God is evil.

§2.3: The Possibility and Significance of Divine Revelation

It is bizarre to reject divine revelation, as many deists do, by alleging the impossibility of an exceedingly powerful God to act freely in a world where comparably weaker creatures roam (Lacordaire cited in McGrew, 2013, p. 283). Recognizing this, Paine makes a more modest claim than his deist peers by admitting "the possibility of revelation" despite "totally disbelieving" in it (1892, pp. 175-176).

Moreover, many deists also tend to discredit anything communicated via divine revelation as 'unreasonable' if it is not readily comprehensible. In response, theists tend to highlight the distinction between matters which are supra-rational[32] and irrational[33] (Al-Hamadānī, 1965, vol. 15, p. 110; Ibn Taymiyyah, 2005b, vol. 3, p. 210); therefore, to claim, for example, that angels exist should not be considered something irrational to someone who already

[32] Those notions that are *beyond* our human comprehension, such as belief in supernatural creatures, an afterlife, etc. Something being supra-rational entails that it is *apprehensible* in that its general idea could be understood and grasped, though it may not be *comprehensible* due to our inability to perceive it in its full extent.

[33] Those matters which are inherently incoherent and *contradict* our reason, such as the concept of a married bachelor, a four-sided triangle, etc.

believes in a God powerful enough to create them.[34] Hence, deists need to offer evidence when they allege that a doctrine contradicts reason.

Presuming that divine revelation is possible, should we also deem its occurrence more probable, if not necessary? If we affirm that God is perfectly or exceedingly wise and good, then I maintain that the answer is yes.[35] Below are some of the benefits offered by divine revelation which substantiate its significance.

§2.3.1: Divine Revelation Elucidates the Central Moral Dictates of God

Deists who affirm divine goodness believe that by 'contemplating over nature,' we can deduce and thereby emulate God's moral character. In addition to denying God's providence, they hold scientific inquiry in high regard. Simultaneously adhering to these stances is problematic because evolutionary biologists mention that, given natural selection, everything we observe around us is accidental and 'God's hand' "is not manifest in the products of nature." Instead, we only find the "blind forces of physics" at play (see Gould and Dawkins in Plantinga, 1997, pp. 8-9). Furthermore, deists cannot appeal to theistic evolution, which teaches that God directed the process of evolution, for they do not believe that God operates in the world. Therefore, how can deists claim to infer God's moral dictates via 'contemplation of nature' when this very 'nature' is the 'impersonal handiwork' of other than God?

[34] Moreover, if one's reason makes him conclude that a religion is true, then he is warranted to believe in the supra-rational claims of that religion in the absence of any evidence disproving those claims.

[35] This argument specifically applies to the overwhelming majority deists who either affirm one or both of the following attributes for God: wisdom and goodness.

Deists can respond by suggesting that when God created the world, he set evolution in motion without intervening in the process afterward, but he predetermined that the evolutionary process would *naturally* unfold in the manner he desired. But this response is problematic for two reasons: First, the deist's stance on God's providence starts to become fuzzy. If God predetermined down to the letter something as intricate as the evolutionary process which involves the behaviors exhibited by countless species over long periods, then what sense does it make to deny God's involvement in our world? God's foreordination of the world in a single act without actively 'intervening' later on is unlike God being *inoperative* in the world, for theistic evolution entails that God's direction is being actualized constantly and that alone constitutes a functional presence of his will. Secondly, the notion of 'natural law' becomes superficial if it is, in fact, *supernaturally* predetermined to operate in an exact and divinely ordained manner.

Divine revelation, on the other hand, faces no such problem. God can choose to convey his moral dictates through prophets and scriptures. Even if believers of God's revelation differ over the interpretation of some of God's edicts, it will be within the confines of narrowly specified boundaries. The prophets God sends will serve as practical role models to emulate (Al-Ghazālī, 2003, pp. 141-142). Morality and jurisprudence will not be susceptible to personal whims and desires or even sincerely, yet subjective, exercised judgments of people's fallible reasoning. Theists would insist that our unaided reason can only assist us in knowing moral *universals* (e.g., justice is virtuous, gratuitous harming of others is evil, etc.) but not in knowing with absolute confidence many of the moral *particulars* (e.g., the moral status of euthanasia, abortion, etc.) (Al-Ghazālī, 1975, p. 58; Al-Jawzīyyah, 2011, vol. 2, pp. 1153-1154). Thus, if a good God does exist, as many deists affirm, it is more probable, if not necessary, that he would convey to us his moral law via revelation. This revelation would divulge moral edicts which

cannot be deduced through reasoning, and it could also reconfirm or remind us of moral injunctions inferable by our intellect (Al-Āmidī, 2004, vol. 4, p. 50; Al-Fihrī, 2010, p. 518).

§2.3.2: Divine Revelation Can Unveil Matters Inaccessible to Our Unaided Reason

Theists maintain that divine revelation plays a significant role in providing us with answers to questions human reason alone cannot confidently address, such as: For what purpose did God create us? Does God demand that we worship him? If so, does he expect us to perform our prayers in a particular manner? Is there an afterlife? If yes, will there be divine judgment? Is there a heaven and hell? If so, is there a plan for salvation which we need to be made aware of?

Deists who believe in doctrines such as immortality and divine judgment maintain that we can deduce them by pure reason. However, if that is so, why do deists themselves differ with each other regarding these doctrines? In fact, why is it that many intelligent and well-informed people adopt some form of theistic religion, as opposed to deism, if our reason is to suffice as a guide for discovering religious truth (Wainwright, 2013, p. 56)? How is it that brilliant theologians and philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) could assert that our reason can lead us to conclude that there is only one God (Aquinas cited in Byrne, 1989, p. 2), while other brilliant philosophers such as David Hume (d. 1776) and John Hick would beg to differ? Why is it that many God-believing philosophers do not believe in immortality (An-Nasafī, 2011, pp. 682-683) in contrast with the many deists who do? Why does God abandon us in this confused state? Does he not care whether we believe in sound theological doctrines? If not, then why are many deists wasting their time contemplating creeds God does not even care about?[36]

[36] As I have explained earlier, I am not insinuating that disagreements should not arise if we are utilizing a specific epistemic tool. Rather, the concern is that in the absence of revelation, disputes over doctrines are vastly more *open-ended* without an objective reference point to base one's arguments upon.

John Locke (d. 1704) believed in the necessity of revelation because laziness, corruption, lust, carelessness, and angst could taint the human mind, thereby negatively impacting human reason (Byrne, 1989, pp. 41-42). An-Nasafī (d. 1114) categorizes people broadly into three groups: 1) those who are intelligent and dedicate time to research; 2) those who are intellectually capable but are too occupied with 'worldly affairs' to do any research; and 3) those who are not intellectually capable of doing research (2011, pp. 82-83). He explains that the first group is rare and that the bulk of people are among the second and third groups. Considering this, he argues that most people require divine revelation, as they cannot rely on their reason to attain religious truths. An-Nasafī also insists that the first group of people require revelation as well, for they cannot be certain of everything without revelation. He points out that even the first group of people constantly consult and differ with each other on several religious matters; therefore, they cannot be relied on collectively to provide clear-cut answers to the masses (Ibid., p. 679).

§2.3.3: Divine Revelation Demonstrates God's Compassion

Those who believe in God as a perfectly benevolent being naturally desire to form a loving communion with him. God connecting with them by communicating with them would count as a reciprocal expression of love (Leftow cited in Wainwright, 2013, p. 62). If God is benevolent to humanity, as many deists believe, then the expectation is that he desires to speak to his creation and show concern for their affairs. Even if a deist argues that God already acted compassionately 'enough' to humans by gifting them with the faculty of reason, that does not discount the fact that God's desire to speak to people through prophets and revealed scriptures would afford us an additional reason to appreciate his munificence and mercy (An-Nasafī, 2011, p. 683; Al-Busnawī, 2007, p. 269).

§2.3.4: Divine Revelation Clarifies the Nature of Our Relationship with God

What is the nature of a child-mother relationship or that of a student-teacher one? What about citizens of a nation to their president or subjects to their monarch? Answers may vary, but virtually everyone would acknowledge that one party commands respect and authority over the other. Nevertheless, some relationships vary drastically compared to others. In some cultures, an employee's relationship with his manager is much more bureaucratic than in others. Some children form close bonds with their parents while others do not. There are presidents of nations who are considered by their citizens to be 'down to earth' and can be seen shopping in grocery stores like other ordinary people, while in other countries, citizens cannot fathom being within a one-kilometer radius of their president without a security clearance. Regardless, in every given situation and context, people tend to know the nature of their relationship with the other. They know what is required in terms of the demeanor expected of them and protocols they must abide by.

What about the nature of our relationship with God? Is it one of a servant, a spiritual child, or a friend? Perhaps a combination of them all? Endeavoring to answer this question through reason alone leads to nothing more than conjecture; however, divine revelation could be useful in elucidating the nature of this relationship to us.

§2.3.5: Divine Revelation Elevates and Honors the Status of Human Beings

Being knighted by the Queen of the United Kingdom or being personally invited to dine with a head of state are honors worthy of pride. Those honored derive a great sense of worth for having received attention and praise from those of a loftier status. **I**f this is the case with humans, then what about if the infinitely powerful and beneficent God chooses to communicate to mankind who are infinitely lesser than him in status? Surely, this would make human beings

recognize the inherent worth which God afforded to them, as opposed to deism, where God appears to be uncaring about their affairs.

§2.3.6: Divine Revelation Justifies the Moral Accountability of Sinners

On the Day of Judgment, those who engaged in unethical behavior may rightfully appeal to their ignorance of the moral dictates they were obligated to follow, given the absence of revelation. They could claim that they had thought God was amoral and did not care whether they were behaving ethically or not or that they had not believed in objective morality. Perhaps, they could argue that they were unaware of God's expectation to worship him. They could try to justify their unethical behavior by maintaining that they never received the moral guidance required to help them distinguish right from wrong. On the other hand, divine revelation would render such excuses obsolete so that justice could be served (Al-Laqānī, 2009, vol. 1, pp. 670-672).[37]

Theists have offered other reasons that reveal the importance of revelation: It teaches us how to express our gratitude to God for the favors he bestowed upon us (An-Nasafī, 2011, pp. 676-678); it informs us of our purpose in life; it gives us direction in our pursuit of happiness (Al-Ghazālī, 2003, p. 141); it explains why God does certain things such as permitting evil to exist in the world (Wainwright, 2013, p. 58); and it guides us on how to nourish our souls (Al-Keilānī & Titān, 1999, p. 720; Kamāl b. Abī Sharīf cited in Al-Keilānī, 1999, pp. 713-714).

[37] This would apply to those who accepted the credibility of that divine revelation but *knowingly* rebelled against its edicts. It would also apply to those who *culpably* rejected that divine revelation's authority. As for those who *inculpably* reject divine revelation sent by God, I discuss this matter from an Islamic theological perspective in the final section dealing with the argument from divine hiddenness.

In conclusion, I have sought to demonstrate the significance of divine revelation in order to debunk deism's undermining of its relevance and benefit. On the contrary, not only is revelation required, it does not behoove a God whom we deem perfectly or exceedingly wise and good to not communicate to humanity via revelation.

Section 3: Are There Good Reasons for Thinking Deism Is True?

After providing three reasons to reject deism, I will now address the following two arguments in support of deism: 1) the impossibility of miracles and 2) the argument from divine hiddenness.

§3.1: The Impossibility of Miracles

There are several theological questions which are passionately debated between deists and theists surrounding the notion of miracles. What is a miracle? Is it possible for God to make miracles happen? If so, would it compromise the perfection of his divine attributes? Could we ever identify one after its occurrence? Why are miracles significant? These are critical questions I intend to address below.

§3.1.1: What is a Miracle?

Voltaire defines a miracle as "the violation of mathematical, divine, immutable, eternal laws." Similarly, David Hume describes a miracle as "a violation of the laws of nature" (citations taken from McGrew, 2019). 'Abdullah Al-Qarnī defines miracles as:

> Signs which violate the laws of nature and are beyond the capacity of human beings, spirits, and demons. They are performed by prophets with support from God as a validation for their proclamation of prophethood, so that they are distinguished from false prophets (2008, p. 138).

Ibn Taymiyyah says that the nature of the miracle can either pertain to knowledge (e.g., foretelling the future) or to power and capacity (e.g., parting the sea) (1989, p. 150). He is careful to distinguish miracles from supernatural acts performed by demons, sorcerers, and fortune-tellers, for miracles, are only performed by prophets for righteous reasons (1989, p. 141), while supernatural actions performed by false prophets, sorcerers, et al. are for purposes of evil (Ibid., pp. 160-162). Ibn Taymiyyah also recognizes that righteous saints can perform miracles, but not at the same spectacular level prophets are capable of (1989, pp. 142-143). For Ibn Taymiyyah, it is critical to affirm the uniqueness of the nature of the miracles performed by prophets so that we can ascertain their prophetic credentials. He believed that the wisdom of God ensures that there be a mechanism to help us distinguish between prophetic miracles and other supernatural acts (Ibid., pp. 143-144, 151, 944).[38]

§3.1.2: Are Miracles Significant?

Paine claims that "the Deist needs none of those tricks and shows called miracles to confirm his faith, for what can be a greater miracle than the creation itself, and his own existence" (1892, p. 398)? His stance makes sense in light of his flat-out rejection of divine revelation. However, if we are open to the possibility of miracles, then their utility becomes apparent in that they assist us in determining what the true revealed religion of God is. Thus, miracles are undoubtedly significant in this regard.

§3.1.3: Are Miracles Identifiable?

There are two epistemological questions which require answering. First, is it possible to rely on eyewitness testimony to determine whether a miracle has happened? If so, then is it

[38] I will provide some of the ways suggested by Ibn Taymiyyah below.

possible to distinguish a miracle performed by a genuine prophet from supernatural acts performed by false prophets, demons, et al.?

Regarding the first question, McGrew mentions that the most common types of arguments that are advanced in trying to prove the existence of miracles are four: 1) deductive, 2) criteriological, 3) explanatory, and 4) probabilistic (2019, para. 22). All four methods have shortcomings when typically applied, yet the effectiveness of each must be judged on a case-by-case basis. Thus, just because one concludes that Christians have failed to successfully utilize such arguments when proving the occurrence of Christ's alleged resurrection, for example, that does not warrant conjecturing that non-Christian theists are also guaranteed to fail when arguing for the veracity of their faith. The epistemological challenges concerned with the identification of miracles is a highly complex topic which cannot be adequately addressed in a couple of paragraphs. However, I would like to highlight the following important remark made by Islamic jurist and polemicist Aḥmad ibn ʻUmar al-Qurṭubī (d. 1258):

> You must know that a miracle only has evidential value for those who know that God exists and that he as a being with power, knowledge, and free will is ascribed with attributes of perfection [which render it probable] that he sends messengers (2012, p. 264).

Thus, as long as the deist insists that God *cannot* be operative in the world, he will always dismiss, *a priori*, any evidence presented to him for miracles, regardless of how strong that evidence is. If, on the other hand, the arguments I have offered so far convince the deist to not only remain open to the possibility of God's involvement in the world but to *expect* it, then the deist should be amenable to considering evidence offered in support of miracles on a case-by-case basis. In other words, a deist who *correctly* affirms God's wisdom and goodness *should*

believe that God would ensure that his prophets' miracles are capable of being identified. If the deist retorts by saying that he has already examined the evidence for the major world religions and remains unconvinced, that still does not justify the claim that miracles can never be identifiable, for how does the deist know whether God may *in the future* choose to send prophets who perform miracles?

Regarding the second question about whether we can distinguish between prophetic miracles and other supernatural acts, Ibn Taymiyyah offered more than a dozen suggestions on how this could be done (1989, pp. 558-560, 664-669). Some of his suggested methods are:

i. Assessment of Moral Character

Prophets are known for their trustworthiness, integrity, generosity, and great character when dealing with others, while false prophets and sorcerers are known for their lies, betrayal, greediness, poor disposition, inscrutability and darkness, and lack of composure.

ii. Assessment of Moral Content of Teachings

Prophets command others to exhibit the best of character. They promote and call for people to cooperate in that which is virtuous and forbid sins, enmity, and cooperation in evil. Prophets command that which results in the benefit of people, while false prophets and sorcerers do the contrary.

iii. Assessment of Sincerity

Prophets praise each other. Each prophet reaffirms the integrity of the divine message his predecessor relayed. Prophets are not looking for special attention for themselves. As for false prophets and sorcerers, they usually discredit each other, display hostility toward one another, and create divisions among themselves.

iv. Assessment of Miracle Workers' Actions

Prophets do not obtain their status of prophethood via learning about it, seeking it, and securing it. No Prophet has ever coveted and worked toward attaining the rank of prophethood. There are no rituals which could be performed to receive the station of prophethood. Instead, it is an appointment and selection by God. As for sorcerers, they learn and train in sorcery and seek the status they desire to obtain. They also vary in their witchcraft skillset depending on how much they have learned and trained to excel at it.

Thus, critical evaluations of the character, morality, sincerity, and teachings of the 'miracle worker' could assist one in distinguishing between true and false prophets.

§3.1.4: Are Miracles Possible?

Deists contend that miracles are impossible. One group of deists denies their possibility on the basis that God *would never* perform them, while another maintains that God *can never* actualize them.[39] Deists who argue that God *would never* perform miracles allege that miraculous divine intervention entails an imperfection in God's wisdom and knowledge since he allegedly had to 'adjust' natural laws which should have been perfect once God put them in place. They maintain that nature reflects God's immutable wisdom and goodness, and as a result, we must discount any possibility of God acting 'capriciously' by 'suspending' the 'natural world order' (Lucci & Wigelsworth, 2015, pp. 176 & 182).

[39] The former could be characterized as an "a priori rationalistic argument," while the latter is an "a priori naturalistic argument" (Lucci & Wigelsworth, 2015, p. 171).

Earlier I cited Spinoza, who argued that God *could not* intervene in the world by performing miracles because it allegedly runs contrary to his nature. McGrew represents Spinoza's argument as follows:

1. The will of God is identical to the laws of nature.
2. A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature.
3. Necessarily, God's will is inviolable.

Therefore,

4. Miracles cannot happen (2019, para. 62).

Thus, whether a deist discounts the possibility of miracles because they would compromise God's perfection to perform them or due to their logically inherent impossibility, what remains clear is that miracles are deemed to be impossible according to deism.

However, do miracles have to be understood as 'violations of nature'? If so, is it possible for God to 'violate' the natural world order? If yes, would that compromise his attributes of perfection? These are three critical questions I shall address below.

Should Miracles Necessarily Be Characterized as Violations of Nature?

The critical question which requires addressing here is: What do we mean by 'nature'? Does nature refer to how things *typically* operate or does it relate to operations which conform to purely natural laws *with no room* for exceptional supernatural interventions? Richard Purtill addresses this question with an interesting analogy which Schlesinger describes as follows:

> The United States, Purtill points out, has a large set of laws regulating human behavior, but occasionally exceptional procedures are introduced, like presidential

> pardons. A miracle may be compared to a presidential pardon, in that the origin of the pardon is outside the ordinary legal procedures. It is unpredictable, and plays no role in the maneuvering of a lawyer in the court, since it cannot be brought about by the means available to him during a court procedure. Similarly, the creation of miracles is not within the scope of a scientist's activities. Yet, a presidential pardon does not constitute a violation of the legal system: it is not illegal, it is *outside* the legal system. In a comparable manner a miracle does not violate, but is outside, the system of nature's laws (2010, p. 398).

Purtill's analogy is interesting because it aims to demonstrate how miracles could operate *outside* natural laws while not directly breaching them when they are actualized. Just as the legal system accommodates exceptional presidential pardons, nature could also 'accommodate' miracles. On this view, miracles are remarkably exceptional events *occurring in*, rather than *in opposition to*, nature.

Another view to consider is one posited by Saint Augustine (d. 430), who believed that miracles are "hidden potentialities" within nature itself which are not *usually* observable to us. What makes their occurrence 'miraculous' is the rarity of their observation in nature (Corner, 2019, para. 5). Hence, on Augustine's view, miracles cannot possibly violate nature since they are part of the very fabric of nature itself.

In consideration of these alternative conceptions of the relationship between miracles and nature, it is incumbent upon the deist to prove that miracles *must* be understood as *violations* of nature.[40]

Could God Violate the Laws of Nature?

Even if we assume that miracles are violations of nature, if God is omnipotent, then surely he has the power to disrupt or suspend the natural laws he put in place. There is no evidence to suggest natural laws are immutable, let alone that they necessarily emanate from God's being as a 'reflection of his character.' Rather, God has the power to voluntarily will the actualization of alterable laws. Neither would violating the natural world order compromise his perfect attributes of wisdom and knowledge, for God could have foreknown and desired that at specific points of human history, he would enable his prophets to perform miracles. Responding to Spinoza, who insists on the immutability of natural laws by alleging that they flow necessarily from God's knowledge and will, Craig states:

> Now contrary to Spinoza, classical theology did not claim that God's knowledge is characterized by necessity. For example, God knows the truth "The universe exists." But God was under no obligation to create the universe. Since creation is a free act, he could have refrained from creating anything at all. If God had not created the world, then he would instead know the truth "No universe exists." Necessarily, then, whatever God knows is true; but it is not necessary that the

[40] For further reading, see Craig (2008, pp. 261-263) who argues that even based on the three dominant views of natural law today: 1) the regularity theory; 2) the nomic necessity theory; and 3) the causal dispositions theory, we do not have to understand miracles as constituting violations of nature.

> content of God's knowledge be what it is. Had he created a different world or no world at all, the content of his knowledge would be different. Hence, just as God is free to will differently than he does, so he is able to have different knowledge than he does (2008, p. 264).

In summary, there do not appear to be any sound reasons for either thinking that God cannot violate the laws of nature or that doing so would compromise the perfection of any of his attributes.

§3.2: The Argument from Divine Hiddenness

One of the arguments deists raise against theistic religions such as Islam and Christianity is the alleged inherent injustice in the notion of nonbelievers being punished in hell (Morais, 1932, p. 435). They deem it unfair that God would only selectively reveal the truth to a 'privileged segment' of the world population while permitting the truth to be effectively 'hidden' from the rest. Thus, they claim not everyone is given an equal opportunity to attain salvation (Byrne, 1989, p. 55). Instead, deists believe God revealed himself to *all* of humanity by endowing them with reason to use to 'contemplate over nature' to discover God's moral character and edicts (Paine, 1892, p. 39).

However, as demonstrated earlier, there are difficulties with accepting the notion that unaided human reason suffices as an epistemic tool. Not everyone has equal access to education to learn how to harness their critical reasoning skills and thus reach the required theological conclusions. There are also individual differences among humans in terms of cognitive function. Moreover, human reason is easily prone to bias, and cultural upbringing could significantly influence one person to opt for a radically divergent conclusion from people of different cultural backgrounds. This means that people are bound to disagree on central theological and ethical

issues. Therefore, even deists have to contend with the fact that God does not, in actuality, 'equally' reveal himself to everyone since people are not equally gifted with the same resources and time to enable the development of their reasoning skills. Hence, it appears that even according to deism, God seems 'hidden' to many people.

Nonetheless, deists could put forth another argument. They could argue that God is, in fact, hidden and that his hiddenness makes more sense from a deistic perspective than a theistic one. They could appeal to John Schellenberg's renowned version of the argument from divine hiddenness in support of their case. In what follows, I introduce Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness as explicated by him. Though the argument is originally formulated as proof for atheism, I will explain how it could also be employed in favor of deism. Lastly, I will offer a rebuttal to the argument.[41]

§3.2.1: Schellenberg's Divine Hiddenness Argument (SDHA)

Schellenberg's argument is formulated as follows:

> 1. If a perfectly loving God exists, then there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person.

[41] There are different formulations of the divine hiddenness argument; however, Schellenberg's version is by far the most popular and widely discussed. Its formulation is argued to be the "most robust" (Dumsday, 2015, p. 2) and the various versions of the hiddenness argument are said to be "offshoots of J.L. Schellenberg's central argument" (Anderson, 2017, p. 120). Moreover, my rebuttal to Schellenberg's argument would apply to the other versions, so I deemed it unnecessary to discuss all of the argument's variations here.

2. If there exists a God who is always open to a personal relationship with any finite person, then no finite person is ever non-resistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.

3. If a perfectly loving God exists, then no finite person is ever non-resistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists (from 1 and 2).

4. Some finite persons are or have been non-resistantly in a state of nonbelief in relation to the proposition that God exists.

5. No perfectly loving God exists (from 3 and 4).

6. If no perfectly loving God exists, then God does not exist.

7. God does not exist (from 5 and 6) (2017a, p. 1).

In premise 1, God being 'perfectly loving' for Schellenberg denotes that he is "unsurpassably loving and caring" (Schellenberg, 2004a, p. 33). Just like a loving mother for her child, God's love toward his creation entails: 1) providing them immediate responses to their requests; 2) sparing them of any 'needless' trauma and fostering their physical and spiritual well-being; 3) not encouraging them to have misleading thoughts about their relationship to God; 4) desiring a personal interaction with them whenever possible; and 5) longing for personal interaction with them if it is ever absent (Ibid.).

In premise 2, when Schellenberg says "personal relationship," he is referring to "a conscious, interactive, and positively meaningful relationship" (2015, p. 38). God, as a perfectly loving being, is expected to value the "relationship for its own sake" (Ibid., p. 43) and would have created human beings for such a relationship (1996, p. 462). Also, 'nonresistance' for Schellenberg entails that nonbelief in God is not due to "any emotional or behavioral opposition

towards God" (2008b, para. 2). He mentions four categories of people who he believes qualify to come under the class of nonresistance: 1) former believers; 2) lifelong seekers; 3) converts to non-theistic religions; and 4) isolated non-theists (2007, pp. 228-242).

In premise 3, Schellenberg stresses that there cannot be any instant of time when nonresistant people do not believe in God and have a personal relationship with him (2005b, p. 206; 2015, p. 106). Schellenberg dismisses any attempt to justify why God may not *instantly* guide nonresistant people to believe in him. He argues that given God's "infinite resourcefulness," any other "goods" which God would be interested in procuring (e.g., moral freedom of his creatures, etc.) could be realized without having to compromise on his relationship with nonresistant people (2007, pp. 215-216). Schellenberg insists that even if there are goods which are not logically attainable unless God temporarily permits an absence of a relationship with nonresistant people, then these goods cannot possibly outweigh a relationship with God in importance anyway (2004a, p. 37). Thus, Schellenberg maintains that God, given his perfect love, must only seek goods which are "relationship-compatible" (2015, p. 109). He contends that a perfectly loving God would have created the world while ensuring that the pursuit of any relationship-incompatible goods is not required (Ibid., pp. 45-46).

In premise 4, Schellenberg argues that such nonresistant people do exist. If premises 3 and 4 are true, then premise 5 follows. Premise 6 is phrased in a manner which suggests that the only possible notion of God is one who is perfectly loving; however, Schellenberg does qualify this assertion elsewhere, as I will show in the next section. Finally, the conclusion follows from premises 5 and 6.

In summary, Schellenberg believes that his characterization of what he expects a perfectly loving God to connote is a superior and more "intellectually attractive picture" of a

perfect God (Schellenberg, 2005c, p. 300), and thus if God as an ultimately perfect being does exist, he should satisfy the requirements of Schellenberg's assumptions of divine perfection.

§3.2.2: How Is SDHA Relevant to Deism?

SDHA is formulated in a manner seeking to prove atheism right. So why is this argument relevant to deism? It is relevant because the SDHA is attacking the concept of a theistic God instead of the deistic one (Howard-Snyder, 2016, para. 43; Ventureyra, 2018, p. 910). Even though Schellenberg himself appears to not think so highly of a deistic-like notion of God (2005a, p. 340; 2015, pp. 108-109), he does admit that his argument is mostly against "traditional theism" (2004a, p. 41). Hence, a deist could use SDHA to his advantage. A deist could evade SDHA by denying God's goodness—and thus his love—altogether. Alternatively, if the deist does affirm God's love, he may choose not to do so as an omni-property, thereby contending that God could be *very* loving but not necessarily *perfectly* loving. Therefore, not only does the SDHA lose its force against deism, but the deist could also utilize the SDHA in his favor to lend credibility to his conception of God.

§3.2.3: A Critique of SDHA

Despite disagreements over Schellenberg's characterization of what perfect love entails,[42] I will be focusing my critique on Schellenberg's assertion that God's attribute of perfect love

[42] Schellenberg notes that philosophers would not dispute that perfect love is a necessary attribute of God (2005b, p. 201); however, this does not necessitate that Schellenberg's understanding of what this divine property entails is indisputable. Some believe that perfect love only connotes a "desire for seeking open relationship, not that it entails the actual seeking" (Dumsday, 2015, p. 11). Others adopt an apophatic theological stance on God's attributes, whereby they do not literally affirm that God loves anyone (Howard-Snyder, 2016, para. 43). Some suggest that Schellenberg is relying on a specific Christian understanding of perfect love and using that understanding to represent the entirety of traditional theism

necessitates that there cannot be any possible reason for why God could temporarily delay the materializing of a relationship with those deemed to be nonresistant. Schellenberg bases his contention on two underlying assumptions: 1) a loving relationship with God is the *greatest good*; thus, no other good could possibly warrant the delay of it coming to fruition, and 2) nonresistance entails that this is both the ideal and required time for God to guide the nonbeliever by entering into a loving relationship with him. I will dispute both assumptions below.

A Critique of the First Assumption

I wish to propose a unique possible reason for why God created nonresistant people to endure not having a relationship with him temporarily.[43] Islamic theology teaches the doctrine of the *Ahlul Fatrah*. The *Ahlul Fatrah* refer to nonbelievers who have not received the message of Islam in an undistorted manner. Islam teaches that those who die in the state of being among the *Ahlul Fatrah* will be given a special test by God in the afterlife to have their eternal fate

(Dole, 2018, p. 301). Schellenberg acknowledges these objections (2015, p. 89; 2017b, p. 7) but insists that his characterization of perfect love is more befitting of a perfect God.

[43] A wide range of suggested reasons has been proffered to explain why God may temporarily allow a nonresistant person to remain 'relationship-less' with him. A few examples are God 1) waiting for the person to have correct motives to believe in God; 2) respecting moral autonomy by waiting for the person to *freely* believe in God; 3) allowing the person's intensity of desire for God to develop further; 4) letting the person's understanding of God to deepen more accurately; 5) waiting for the person to fulfill certain conditions such as repentance of previously committed sins; 6) waiting for the person's love for God to become more genuine; 7) encouraging the pursuit of virtue by allowing nonresistant people to traverse the path of seeking God, etc. (Azadegan, 2014, p. 109; Howard-Snyder, 2016, para. 36; McFall, 2016, p. 9; Paytas, 2017). Schellenberg has dismissed these attempts either because he deems them to be *lesser* goods or attainable without God having to temporarily put a hold on the relationship with the nonresistant person.

determined. Those who had been sincere truth-seekers who sought God and did everything they reasonably could to discover God, given their physical and intellectual capacities, would pass the special test and subsequently enter heaven to enjoy an everlasting idyllic relationship with God (Al-Jawzīyyah, 2008, pp. 899-903).[44] But why would God create the *Ahlul Fatrah*? I propose that one possible purpose for their creation was to serve as a test for believers who were collectively duty-bound to preach Islam to them. God created human beings to test their loyalty to him. According to Islam, one of God's moral edicts is that his divine message be spread to all corners of the earth. Thus, the apparent existence of the *Ahlul Fatrah* is a signal and reminder to believers that there are sincere nonbelievers who would be receptive to their preaching if done effectively. The existence of the *Ahlul Fatrah* deprives believers of any opportunity to justify their shortcomings in preaching their faith by arguing that effective proselytization would have been futile since nonbelievers are *resistant* to the truth anyway. The existence of the *Ahlul Fatrah* could implicate believers who may have to answer to God in the hereafter for why they failed to advance their faith. Thus, the *Ahlul Fatrah* play a pivotal role in God's test for humanity. More importantly, they will not be wronged since they will be given a special divine test in the afterlife which will justly determine their fate.

Schellenberg could counter that God's ultimate reason for allowing the *Ahlul Fatrah* to exist does not justify his temporary suspension of a relationship with them, for there is no greater good than having a relationship with God. But there are two problems with that argument. First, it presumes that we can discern all the moral goods which are attainable behind a given divine action; however, due to our limited knowledge and wisdom, we cannot justify having such

[44] This Islamic doctrine stands in contrast to Christian theology which denies the existence of inculpable nonbelief (Parker, 2014, pp. 154-155).

confidence (Sokoloski, 2012, p. 111). Secondly, Schellenberg has not offered any objective method that we are obligated to follow when assessing the 'value' of moral goods. Some moral goods are incommensurable and cannot be objectively compared and contrasted in value terms. To explicate this point, Parker provides the following illustration:

> Consider an instance where my four-year old son Jacob is trying to put together a puzzle which is difficult for him to do. I can help him complete the puzzle, or I can let him try to do it on his own. If I help, Jacob experiences my concern for him in a tangible way, we can have the good of working together in completing the task, and the possibility of his failing can be avoided. On the other hand, Jacob completing the puzzle without my help would be valuable for him, both intrinsically and instrumentally (e.g.,, in increasing his confidence, completing a difficult task on his own, etc.). It seems to me that the opposing sets of goods in this situation are such that there is not a determinate ranking of one over the other, and I would be morally justified in choosing to help *or* to refrain from helping. I think that something similar is the case, though obviously on a vastly larger scale, for God when deciding what general strategy to take with regard to providing evidence for his existence, or when deciding to allow a specific case of divine hiddenness (2014, pp. 152-153).

Parker also provides the following moral goods which are attainable if God grants believers the freedom to proselytize to nonbelievers, as opposed to God always intervening to *instantly* guide nonresistant nonbelievers: 1) moral freedom; 2) intellectual probation; 3) social dependency; 4)

learning for oneself that God exists; and 5) desiring to know God (2014, pp. 180-191).[45] Furthermore, any 'harms' which may result from a temporary absence of a relationship with God would be offset by two things: 1) elimination of that harm and 2) just compensation for that harm. Both apply in the case of the sincere truth-seekers from among the *Ahlul Fatrah*. Islam teaches that those who make it to heaven will forget any hardships they might have endured in this life,[46] and this would include the *elimination* of any emotional scars carried over from the absence of a relationship with God. Furthermore, the *Ahlul Fatrah* who pass God's special test will be *compensated* with eternity in paradise, which is infinitely longer than any temporal amount of hardship endured. With the harm eliminated, in addition to the person being more than justly compensated, any anguish which may have arisen from God's hiddenness would be offset.

One may raise a Kantian objection and argue that it appears that God is using the *Ahlul Fatrah* as a *means* to test those who believe in him, while human beings should be treated as *ends* in themselves. Keeping aside the fact that this is not problematic according to Divine Command Theory, there is still no indication that God is unjustly exploiting the *Ahlul Fatrah* here. Kant's humanity formula does not entirely prohibit that we use people as means but rather insists that we must not *exploit* human beings to merely serve as a means to fulfill our ends (Johnson, 2016, para. 45). God does not do this with the *Ahlul Fatrah*, for he recognizes their human worth and sincerity, and desires to have an everlasting relationship with those among

[45] These goods similarly apply in the case where God grants believers the freedom to preach to the *Ahlul Fatrah*.

[46] See Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Ḥadīth 2807; available from: https://sunnah.com/muslim/52/42

them who pass his test. This is far removed from Kant's concern about human beings being reduced to mere means.

A Critique of the Second Assumption

To insist that divine perfection demands *instantaneous* remedial action to bring affairs into an ideal state is a significant claim, which, when consistently applied to all of God's attributes, strips God of his agency to do what he wills. For example, should we understand that God's being 'perfectly just' necessitates that God *instantly* brings unrepentant sinners to justice? Hardly any theologian would concur. So why make such demands when it comes to divine love?

Schellenberg's approach to the divine property of love restricts the other attributes (e.g., omnipotence, wisdom, etc.) by making God's love dominate over them. But why can't God be powerful and wise enough to actualize a world wherein some people are trialed with a test whose spin-off is that some nonresistant people are left temporarily unguided by God? Why cannot God's allowing a temporary suspension in relations with nonresistant nonbelievers form a part of his perfect plan to test his creation? Schellenberg's presupposition is that once a nonbeliever qualifies as nonresistant, this *must* entail that this is the ideal and required time for God to guide the nonbeliever by entering into a relationship with him. But ideal for whom? It may not be optimal for God, who has created humanity with moral autonomy for the purpose of also testing them. For a state of affairs to be 'ideal,' it *ought* to be in a certain way to achieve a predefined objective. But what if God's motive to create is testing humanity by providing them with sufficient moral freedom which likely results in the temporary existence of nonresistant nonbelievers? Schellenberg, in his attempt to elevate God's perfection by exaggerating the implications of perfect love, has undermined God's omnipotence and ability to do things which are neither logically impossible nor evidently contrary to his divine nature. Schellenberg believes

that his notion of a perfectly loving God is "superior" to others; however, one could argue that Schellenberg's conception of God results in an *inferior* idea of God whose omnipotence is compromised.[47]

In summary, there is no substantive evidence provided in support of SDHA's premises: that a nonresistant person's relationship with God is the highest good which trumps all other moral goods, and that divine perfection necessitates *immediate* action to actualize an 'ideal' state of affairs.

Conclusion

Deism negates God's providence and, as a result, vehemently denies the notion of divine revelation. I proffered three criticisms of deism. In the first one, I demonstrated that deism does not make sense considering God's attribute of wisdom, for divine wisdom entails that action is only taken when there is an underlying purpose and that this is incongruous with the deistic negation of God's providence. In my second critique, I argued that God's worldly noninvolvement is discordant with affirming his attribute of goodness. I also critiqued those deists who do not affirm God's goodness by arguing that it leaves them with unappealing theological choices. In my third critique, I highlighted the importance of divine revelation in order to undermine the deistic claim that it is futile. Then, I proceeded to refute two arguments in favor of deism. The first argument has to do with whether miracles are possible, and I showed that miracles are not only logically possible but probable. The second argument is the argument

[47] It is similar to how some compromise God's *necessary existence* because they have gone to the extreme in terms of their conception of God's omnipotence whereby they argue that God is 'powerful' enough to terminate his own life. Comparably, Schellenberg's understanding of what perfect love entails severely constrains God's ability to do many things which are *not* inherently impossible.

from divine hiddenness, and I demonstrated that its critical underlying assumptions are highly disputable.

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